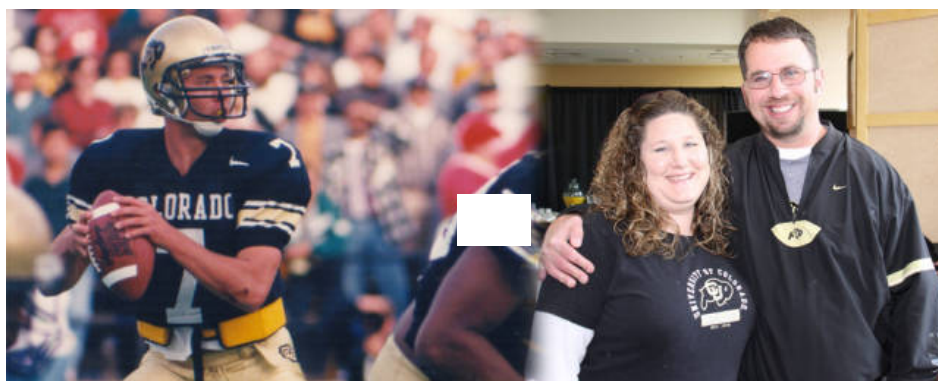




By: CUBuffs.com

Former Colorado quarterback John Hessler, pictured right with his wife, Sarah, has come a long way since a near-fatal car accident 10 years ago this weekend.



Brooks: Ten Years Later, Hessler's Strides Remarkable

Release: October 17, 2013

By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

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BOULDER – It has been 10 often excruciating and uncertain years since he could bring himself to utter these words, but John Hessler now believes he can say them with more certainty than he might ever have dreamed:

"I am back in control of things . . . I'm feeling like my old self."

There are, of course, caveats. A person does not endure the physical, mental and emotional trauma that Hessler experienced 10 years ago Saturday and breeze back into normalcy. But Hessler, with lots and lots of help and equal amounts of determination, has battled – certainly with more bouts to come.

On Oct. 19, 2003, the former Colorado quarterback was driving on Interstate 76 when a Chevy Blazer sideswiped his Honda Accord, sending it across the median and into the path of an oncoming pickup truck.

The Blazer's driver and his passenger fled and were never identified. Hessler was left severely injured, slumped over and unable to breath until a passer-by crawled into the wreckage and lifted Hessler's head, opening his air passage and allowing Hessler to resume breathing.

Hessler, then 29, was teaching seventh-grade social studies at a Brighton middle school (Vikan) and assisting the football team at Regis High School. With the accident, his world went haywire. He was in coma for 33 days. A titanium plate was implanted in his skull. His playing weight of nearly 200 pounds eventually dropped to 143.

Hessler had to learn how to walk again, how to prepare himself for daily chores. He fought depression. Things are better now, he said: "The last couple of years have been good for me. But just after accident, it was as slow as can be . . . there were rough patches – lots of them."



Like anyone, Hessler says he "loves getting

compliments." Last month, I saw him for the first time in a year or more at a CU football practice where several dozen former players attended. He was markedly improved, and when I told him so, he beamed.

John Hessler (7) came off the bench to lead Colorado to a 29-21 upset over No. 3 Texas A&M in 1995.

"It's so good to hear people say that," he said. "And I hear it all the time, so there must be something to it."

There is, but his journey has been difficult and complicated. Initial help from his family and the CU family helped him cope. Former Buffs skier Gary Gisle introduced Hessler to hippotherapy, which features horseback riding as a tool for physical and emotional therapy.

"I believe it was instrumental," Hessler said. "People were working with me week in and out, and it instilled confidence in me. Helped with my footwork and gait, things like that. I wasn't well at being in a street by myself. . . so they would take me into a field and have me walk to a fence – just to get me used to being in an open space, like an intersection.

"At first, I would sit down and cry my ass off. I was afraid of falling or whatever might have happened. It took a few months to get past that and now I don't remember being that way."

Hessler feels "really lucky and blessed to have people step into my life that have." Former Buffs coach Bill McCartney, who recruited Hessler from Brighton; Dave Plati, CU's director of athletic media relations; and numerous others looked in on Hessler and provided for him. He said his last CU coach, Rick Neuheisel, "has been a super blessing . . . he took time out of his schedule to come see me and he flew me to wherever he was coaching (Washington, Baltimore/NFL, UCLA). He's done a lot of things for me and allowed me to meet a lot of cool people."



John Hessler credits many in helping his healing process, including his former head coach at CU, Rick Neuheisel.

Hessler now gets around without the assistance of a walker, a step he now calls the roughest stage of his rehabilitation. His wife of 31 1/2 years, Sarah, was his physical therapist and "when she got me as patient," Hessler recalled, "she used to ask me if I was using (the walker). I said, 'Of course not.'

"Then she'd leave, I'd go and get it. When she found out, she took it to her car and I never used it again. When I first started walking, I'd hold on to her. She was my walker, she guided me. Slowly and surely, we ended that. She'd just hold my hand (for stability). Now we hold hands as lovers."

On Aug. 7, the Hesslers had a daughter, Leah Katherine, who will be baptized Saturday, forcing him to miss CU's noon game against Charleston Southern. Hessler also has a son, Devin, 15.

Hessler plans to attend the Buffs' Pac-12 bout with Arizona the following Saturday (Oct. 26). He was at CU's game against Central Arkansas on Sept. 7, even making an on-field appearance and throwing (and completing) a pass to a fan at halftime.

"That was amazing to me – that I completed it," he said. "I couldn't do that when I was healthy."

Ah, not entirely true. As a CU quarterback, Hessler – a professional baseball and football prospect – enjoyed more than one Saturday in the spotlight. A snapshot from his 1995 season:

- Hessler replaces injured starter Koy Detmer during the first quarter against No. 3 Texas A&M and runs for two touchdowns and throws for 177 yards and one touchdown in CU's 29-21 home win;
- Then next weekend, in what most Buffs fans recall as the "asterisk" game against No. 10 Oklahoma and then-coach Howard Schnellenberger, Hessler threw a school-record five TD passes in a 38-17 win. Schnellenberger had said with CU's starting QB injured, he didn't want an asterisk placed beside the 'W' if/when the Sooners won. "One of my favorite moments, without a doubt," said Hessler;
- He tied his school mark by throwing for five touchdowns in a 45-32 win at Oklahoma State;

- In CU's lopsided Cotton Bowl win (38-6) against Oregon, Hessler passed for two touchdowns;
- Hessler finished the 1995 season with a school-record 20 TD passes and ranked second in the Big 12 Conference in total offense (204.2 yards a game). He was Division I-A's No. 14-rated QB.

Hessler's resume suggests he has something to share – and he's doing that. He's working with the quarterbacks and receivers as volunteer assistant at Mountain Range High School in Westminster. "I think some of them (players) know that I played quarterback at Colorado, but I don't believe they know what kind of quarterback I was," he said. "Were they even born then? Probably, but they were young, young kids.

"I do think I'm helping them; I think they know what I'm talking about. I think they like me; they'll come up to me just to chat. I'll suggest something to the coaches and I think I'm appreciated by other coaches . . . I'm not as athletic as I used to be, but they know who I was."

I asked him his long-term goals, and he answered, "I want to continue to get better. I want to be a good role model for kids through coaching. And one day I'd like to have a job where I earn money rather than getting it every month."

He has fought supremely, overcome more than any of us can imagine, and is intent on carrying on. Don't doubt his paycheck arriving.

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Colorado Buffaloes Football

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Colorado football: Buffs will try to avoid FCS games in future

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

The Colorado football program will host its second opponent this season from the Football Championship Subdivision on Saturday when Charleston Southern visits Boulder.

CU officials prefer to fill their football schedule with only teams from major college football but this week's game won't be the last for the program against an FCS team.

Last spring, CU agreed to host Nicholls State on Sept. 26, 2015. The Buffs will be allowed to play 13 games that season because they travel to Hawaii to start the season. The NCAA allows programs that travel to Hawaii to play an extra game to offset costs associated with a trip to the islands.

"I can't say that we won't again, because so many factors are involved and it comes down to who is available," Colorado sports information director Dave Plati said in regard to whether CU will schedule more FCS games in the future. "However, our preference is to schedule FBS schools from here on out."

CU started the season with only one FCS team on the slate, but this game was scheduled after a Sept. 14 home game against Fresno State was cancelled because of historic flooding in the area.

Plati is one of three men involved in football scheduling for the program. Plati works to identify teams that share open dates with the Buffs and who would be appealing opponents and destinations for CU fans. He then forwards those suggestions to athletic director Rick George and associate athletic director Jim Senter.

He had the same role under former athletic director Mike Bohn.

Plati said it's possible the Fresno State game that was cancelled this season could be rescheduled in a future season. The contract with the Bulldogs called for one game in Fresno and two games in Boulder. CU is slated to host the Bulldogs in 2019 in a game that was supposed to complete the contract.

With the Football Bowl Subdivision switching to a four-team playoff to decide a national champion beginning next season, CU and many other schools will be mindful of putting together strong schedules, assuming strength of schedule is included among the factors the selection committee considers in choosing the four teams.

"We have discussed the fact that in the future, you don't want to jeopardize your team's chances to be selected for the playoff by losing points in the scheduling part of the equation," Plati said. "Historically, we have a pretty good track record of playing quality Division I, FBS schedules and remain one of three schools to win a national championship playing what was determined to be the nation's toughest schedule."

Plati said the only three programs to win a national title playing the nation's toughest schedule are Penn State in 1982, Colorado in 1990, and Florida in 1996 and 2006.

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Colorado football: Buffs' Daigh finding ways to contribute

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

CU linebacker Brady Daigh hasn't been playing nearly as much on defense this season as he did a year ago because of the emergence of true freshman linebacker Addison Gillam.

But Daigh is finding other ways to make significant contributions. He is the leading special teams points earner through the first five games this season, playing on the kickoff and kickoff return teams and the punt and punt return teams.

"I'm trying to do my part for the team and help us win," Daigh said.

It's not as if Daigh isn't also contributing to the defense. He actually led the Buffs in tackles last week at Arizona State with 10 total stops. Daigh is best suited to playing a more physical brand of football because he isn't as fast as coaches need him to be against spread offenses, but he's making sure he is ready whenever coaches call his number.

"I felt I did pretty well out there," Daigh said. "It was good getting back out there with the defense."

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Charleston Southern's 7-0 football team creating "electric" campus

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

When athletic director Rick George approached Charleston Southern about filling the Colorado football team's vacant date Saturday, Buccaneers coach Jamey Chadwell didn't know he would lose his senior quarterback for the season. He didn't know he would lose his preseason all-conference defensive end for the season. He didn't know his best safety couldn't play, either.

Then again, he also didn't know his team would be 7-0, ranked 24th nationally in FCS or sell out its two home games.

Suddenly, punting a badly needed bye week doesn't look like such a bad idea. By filling a hole in CU's schedule vacated by the Buffaloes' flooded-out Fresno State game Sept. 14, Charleston Southern is poised to leap into a spotlight that's never shined its way.

"I tell you, the notoriety we've received in the city and, really, in the state, has been phenomenal," Chadwell said during a phone interview. "The campus is electric for the first time in Lord knows when."

Well, it couldn't be before 1964.

That's when the Christian school was founded (originally as Baptist College) with the mission, Chadwell said, "to represent Jesus in all we do."

Charleston Southern didn't start playing football until 1991, doing so as a Division III independent. The team's facilities, including 4,000-seat Buccaneer Field, reflect that modest start. Chadwell isn't kidding himself. He knows the main reason for agreeing to play the Buffs was the undisclosed financial guarantee.

But the timing isn't bad, either.

At noon at Folsom Field, the Buccaneers will meet Colorado, a 2-3 team that has been waxed in all three of its Pac-12 games and will have a true freshman quarterback making his first start.

"I don't think we'll be struck by the moment," Chadwell said. "Whether we're good enough to win? I don't know. We have to play really well and they have to play lousy. But we played Florida with (Tim) Tebow and guys were like, 'Whoa!'"

"This team is more prepared now."

The Buccaneers have played the likes of Tebow, but not very well. They are 0-13 against FBS (formerly Division I-A) teams, losing by an average score of 55-9.

But these Buccaneers are different. Chadwell, an assistant at Charleston Southern from 2004-08, is in his first year in charge of the program after developing his head coaching chops at Division II Delta State and North Greenville.

He has made the Buccaneers believe. Six of their seven games were touch-and-go tense in the fourth quarter.

"With this team," Chadwell said, "chemistry is pretty special."

Their chances would be a lot better if quarterback Malcolm Dixon (torn ACL), defensive end Will Hunt (ACL) and safety Corbin Jackson (broken hand) were playing.

In place of the dual-threat Dixon is freshman Danny Crogham III, a classic drop-back passer who's 31-of-50 passing for 396 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions. The Buccaneers are tied for eighth nationally in turnover margin (plus-1.3) and rank 11th in time of possession (averaging 33 minutes per game).

FCS schools have won 13 games against their big brothers this season. What would it mean if Charleston Southern joined the list?

"I don't know if you could put a price tag on it," Chadwell said.

On TV

Charleston Southern at Colorado, noon Saturday, Pac-12 (430 Comcast-Denver, 5453 Dish, not available on DirecTV)